

Practice Tips

Larry Reynolds, MD, CCFP

“Somersault” maneuver for a tight umbilical cord



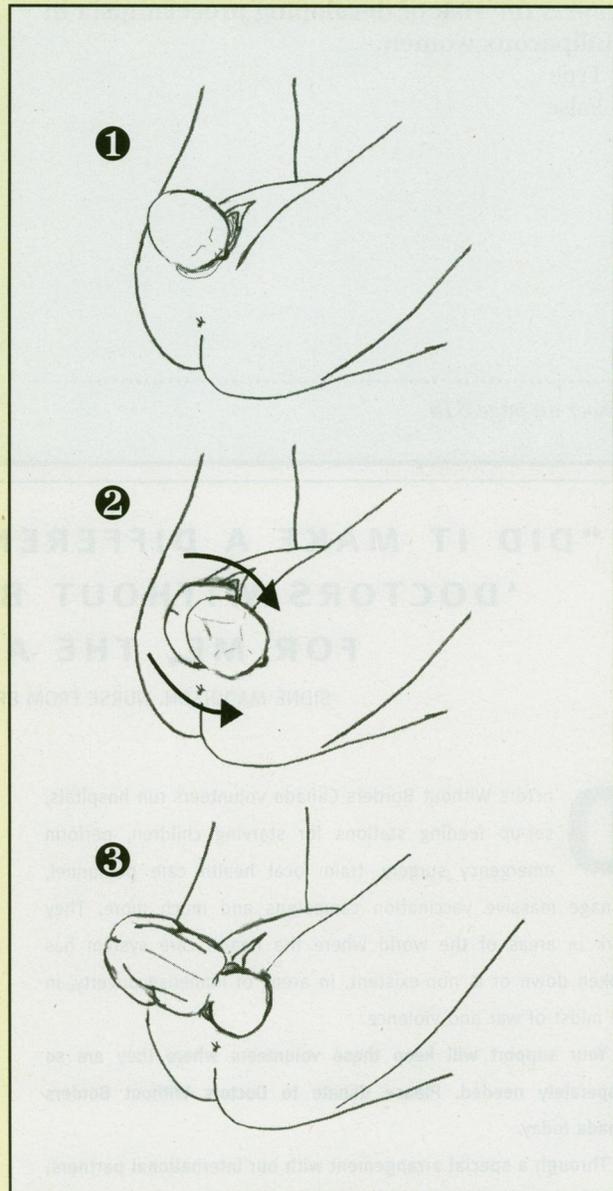
A tight umbilical cord around the baby's neck is an occasional complication of childbirth. A tight cord can be hazardous because it reduces oxygen supply to the baby by compressing the cord. The usual method of sliding the cord over the baby's head will not work because the cord is too tight and strenuous efforts might result in tearing the cord. It

can also be difficult to double clamp and cut the cord, both because of the tightness of the cord and because there is often too little space to maneuver.

The “somersault” technique offers a simple way to assist in the birth of a baby with a tight cord. After the birth of the head, most accoucheurs check for the cord with a fingertip. When a tight cord is diagnosed, the objective is to expedite birth without tearing the cord or worsening cord compression. Pulling down on the baby's head to assist the birth of the body will invariably make the situation worse, as it “tightens the noose.”

The somersault maneuver works by allowing the baby's body to be born past the baby's head. This is effected by pressing with the palm of your hand on the baby's occiput and pushing the baby's face toward the mother's thigh. This allows the shoulders and body to be born in a somersault. While this maneuver is difficult to visualize, it is simple to try, very effective, and almost always surprises anyone using it for the first time. Once the body has been born, the cord can then be unwrapped and the baby carefully assessed. ❖

We encourage readers to share some of their practice experience: the neat little tricks that solve difficult clinical situations. *Canadian Family Physician* pays \$50 to authors upon publication of their Practice Tips. Tips can be sent in by mail to Dr Tony Reid, Scientific Editor, *Canadian Family Physician*, 2630 Skymark Ave, Mississauga, ON L4W 5A4; by fax (905) 629-0893; or by e-mail tony@cfpc.ca.



Dr Reynolds practises family medicine in London, Ont, and is a Professor in the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Western Ontario.